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SUBJECT: MOROCCO: 2009 COUNTRY REPORTS ON TERRORISM

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[1](#)1. Morocco pursued a comprehensive counterterrorism approach that emphasized vigilant security measures, including international cooperation and to a lesser degree counter-radicalization policies. Evidence gained from Moroccan authorities' disruption of certain groups -- and the common characteristics of those groups -- supported previous analysis that Morocco's threat of terrorist attack continued to stem largely from the existence of numerous small "grassroots" extremist cells. These groups, sometimes referred to collectively as adherents of Moroccan Salafia Jihadia ideology, remained isolated from one another, small in size (less than 50 individuals each), and tactically limited. Their international connections were also limited. The Government of Morocco's counterterrorism efforts have effectively reduced the threat, but the existence of these relatively small groups pointed to the need for continued vigilance.

[1](#)2. There were reports of Moroccans going to northern Mali and Algeria to receive training from elements of Al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), with some returning to Morocco but the majority traveling to Iraq and other locations abroad to conduct terrorist attacks. Although AQIM has been unable to support a successful terrorist attack in Morocco to date, Moroccan authorities remained concerned about the "inspiration" and knowledge transfer that AQIM may have provided to Moroccan extremists. AQIM repeatedly tried to incite Moroccans to commit violence against their government through website propaganda. The Government remained concerned about numbers of veteran Moroccan jihadists returning from Iraq to propagate and conduct terrorist attacks at home. A further cause of concern is Moroccans who were radicalized during their stays in Western Europe, such as those connected with the 2004 Madrid train bombings.

[1](#)3. The Moroccan Government pursued a comprehensive counterterrorism approach that, building on popular rejection of terrorism, emphasizes neutralizing existing terrorist cells through traditional intelligence work and preemptive security measures. Morocco aggressively targeted and dismantled terrorist cells within the Kingdom by leveraging intelligence collection, police work and collaboration with regional and other international partners. These efforts resulted in the neutralization of several Salafi Jihadi-inspired terrorist groups. Morocco's counterterrorism

efforts led to the following disruptions of alleged terrorist cells:

-- In February, Moroccan police arrested Abdelkebir Barka at the Mohammed V International Airport upon his return from Syria. He was charged with forming a terrorist cell.

-- In May, the Moroccan police arrested eight alleged members of the terrorist group "Jamaat al Mouslimoun al Joudoud."

-- In June, Moroccan authorities arrested five members of a suspected terrorist cell operating in Morocco and Spain. The group members were adherents of Salafiya Jihadia ideology.

-- In late June, the security services arrested eight individuals on charges of forming a terrorist group, drug trafficking and corruption, among other charges. The leader of the group was Abou Yassine, a former Salafia Jihadia prisoner who had been sentenced previously to two years in jail previously for his involvement in the "Ansar Al Mahdi" terrorist group. The cell operated between Morocco and Spain, according to press reports.

-- In September, security services arrested 24 members of an alleged terrorist network linked to Al-Qa'ida that recruited volunteers for suicide bombings in Iraq, according to the Ministry of Interior. The Interior Ministry stated that the network had coordinated with terrorists in Sweden, Belgium, Iraq and Syria and had sought recruits to fight in Afghanistan and Somalia in addition to Iraq. Those arrested also intended to carry out terrorist acts in Morocco, according to the Ministry.

14. In addition to traditional security measures, Morocco's King Mohammed VI has promoted significant efforts to reduce extremism and dissuade individuals from becoming radicalized. Each Ramadan, for example, the King hosts a series of religious lectures, inviting Muslim speakers from around the world to promote moderate and peaceful religious interpretations. In his Throne Day speech in July, the King highlighted the moderate and tolerant nature of the Sunni Malekite rite, which, he emphasized, forms an integral part of Moroccan identity. After the 2003 Casablanca bombings, Morocco increasingly focused on upgrading places of worship, modernizing the teaching of Islam, and strengthening the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MOIA). Under the MOIA, the pioneering experiment, begun in 2007, of training and using women as spiritual guides continued. Morocco also formed a Council of Ulema for Europe to train and send Moroccan imams and women spiritual guides to counter extremist messages in Moroccan expatriate communities in Europe.

15. During the year, the Moroccan Government continued to implement internal reforms aimed at ameliorating the socio-economic factors that terrorists exploit. The National Initiative for Human Development, launched by the King in 2005, is a USD 1.2 billion program designed to generate employment, combat poverty, and improve infrastructure, with a special focus on rural areas.

16. The Government of Morocco made public commitments that the struggle against terrorism would not be used to deprive individuals of their rights and emphasized adherence to human rights standards and increased law enforcement transparency as part of its approach. The Government generally accorded terrorist suspects and convicts their

rights and due process of law, with more access for defense lawyers and more transparent court proceedings than in previous years. Moroccan laws were effective in leading to numerous convictions and the upholding of convictions of multiple terrorism-related cases:

-- In January, a Moroccan criminal court sentenced Abdelmajid Zerghout to five years in prison for forming a terrorist group. Zerghout had been an imam in Italy before he was extradited to Morocco for his alleged involvement in the terrorist attacks of May 16, 2003 in Casablanca.

-- In February, a Moroccan counterterrorism court condemned the key plotter of the Casablanca attacks, Saad al Hussein, to 15 years in prison. His accomplices received between three and eight years. Then, in June, a Moroccan court raised the jail terms of Al Hussein and five accomplices, who were sentenced for "undermining the national security of the State" and forming a terrorist group, to 20 and 10 years, respectively.

-- In March, a Moroccan court condemned Hassan Haski to 10 years in prison for his involvement in the 2003 terrorist attack in Casablanca.

-- In July, Abdelkader Belliraj was condemned to life in prison for terrorist activities, premeditated murder, attempted murder, and possession of illegal arms and explosives among other charges. The other 34 members of his cell were sentenced to between one and 30 years in prison. According to the police, the network was preparing to carry out acts of violence in Morocco and abroad including assassinations of political figures and Moroccan Jews. Belliraj is now appealing the court's decision.

-- In September, 38 people suspected of belonging to a network that recruited Moroccans for Iraq and Algeria appeared before an anti-terrorist court. Police say the suspects intended to join terrorist groups in desert camps run by AQIM before proceeding to Iraq.

17. As part of its comprehensive approach in combating terrorism, Morocco is also addressing terrorist financing. Although Morocco is not a regional financial center, its financial sector is integrated into international markets. Money laundering is a concern due to the narcotics trade, vast informal sector, trafficking in persons, and large level of remittances from Moroccans living abroad. The extent of the money laundering problem in the country is unknown, but conditions exist for it to occur. In recent years, Morocco has taken a series of steps to address the problem, most notably with the enactment of a terrorism finance (CFT) law in May 2003; with a comprehensive anti-money laundering (AML) law in April 2007; and with the establishment of a Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) in April 2009. These actions have provided the legal basis for the monitoring, investigation, and prosecution of illegal financial activities. The new laws allow for the freezing of suspicious accounts and permit the prosecution of terrorist finance-related crimes. U.S. and EU programs are providing Moroccan police, customs, central bank and government financial officials with training to recognize money laundering methods. The FIU and its member organizations met with the U.S. Department of Treasury and the Department of Homeland Security in early October 2009 to discuss possible U.S. technical assistance to develop the AML/CFT regime. A formal request from the FIU and the Central Bank followed in November 2009. Morocco has a relatively

effective system through the newly established FIU for disseminating U.S. government and UN Security Council Resolution terrorist freeze lists to its financial sector and legal authorities. Morocco has frozen some terrorist-related accounts.

18. Another key to Morocco's counterterrorism efforts has been its emphasis on international cooperation. Moroccan authorities continued to disrupt plots to attack Moroccan, U.S. and other Western-affiliated targets, and aggressively investigated numerous individuals associated with international terrorist groups, often in collaboration with international partners. Morocco and the U.S. worked together extensively on counterterrorism efforts at the tactical level. Morocco and the U.S. made plans to begin joint counter-radicalization programs as well. In the past years, Morocco has accepted prisoners formerly detained at Guantanamo Bay and prosecuted them under Moroccan law. In May, a Moroccan criminal court reduced the sentence of former Guantanamo Bay detainee Mohammed Benmoujane from 10 to two years.

19. Morocco has also forged solid cooperative relationships with European and African partners by sharing information and conducting joint operations. Morocco is considered a Mediterranean Dialogue partner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and also cooperates with regional partners on a bilateral basis. In March, Spanish police arrested a Moroccan on an international warrant issued by Morocco on suspicion of belonging to a terrorist group that had planned attacks on official and tourist targets in Morocco. Morocco also worked closely with African partners such as Mauritania and Senegal. The Government used army and Ministry of Interior paramilitary forces to secure its borders as best it could but faced resource constraints and both a lengthy border and lengthy coastline.

JACKSON